

The Niger Delta Crisis in Nigeria: Pre and Post Amnesty Situation

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Abstract

The emergence of militancy in the Niger Delta region led to problems of insecurity, pipeline vandalisation, disruption of oil output and revenues to the Nigerian government. Against this background the Federal Government initiated an Amnesty programme in 2009. The highly descriptive nature of the study necessitated the adoption of extensive desk research. This study examined critically the pre and post amnesty situation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The findings show that the Amnesty extended to the militants in the area was one of the necessary steps towards resolving the restiveness in the region. In it we recommended that, it is important for government to look beyond the amnesty to address the key issues of underdevelopment (such as widespread poverty, high level of unemployment and lack of basic infrastructure and amenities and environmental degradation) in the region.

Keywords: Militancy, Amnesty situation, underdevelopment, environmental degradation and youth restiveness.

1. Introduction

Over the past fifty years, the Niger Delta terrain has been overrun through deliberate over exploitation carried out in total disregard of basic principles of sustainable environmental management. The ethnic unrest and conflicts of the late 1990s (examples, the Ijaw, Urhobo, Ogoni and Itsekiri), coupled with a spike in the availability of small arms and other weapons, led increasingly to the militarization of the Niger Delta Region. By this time, local and state officials had become involved by offering financial support to those paramilitary groups they believed would attempt to enforce their own political agenda (Wikipedia, 2004).

The fertile ground for all of these clandestine activities of militants was laid by the activities of foreign oil corporations, that is, the multinational companies. The discovery of oil in commercial quantities by the Royal Dutch Shell in Oloibiri in 1956, in present day Bayelsa, attracted other multi-national companies such as ExxonMobil, Total Fina Elf, Agi Chevron and Texaco. The American oil giant, Chevron also discovered hers' in the Escravos Bay in 1963 and operation in production started in 1965. Elf started in 1962 at Obagi, Rivers State. Agip and Texaco commenced exploration in 1962 and 1970 respectively.

The exploration activities of all these oil companies enabled the country to export 2 million barrel per day (bpd) in 1972 (Mebbine 2000, unpublished). Since then production capacity increased tremendously, generating huge revenue to government, yet the host communities, that is, communities from which this "black gold" petroleum is gotten continue to live in abject poverty and with devastated socio-economic environment. This situation of impoverishment and heinous environmental crimes led to the emergent of agitations and contentions in the region.